

## **Hinde Street Methodist Church**

17 November 2019 11.00am

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Luke 21v8: He said to them, 'Beware that you are not led astray...'

Eighty years ago as it became clear that Britain was about to go to war, the Government's Ministry of Information commissioned a series of posters. The intention was both to promote patriotism and to try to allay some of the fears and boost spirits. Thousands of copies of the posters were printed. The war came and afterwards it seems that the posters were largely forgotten. Then, around the turn of the century, some booksellers in Northumberland bought a box of books in an auction and when they unpacked them discovered at the bottom of the box one of the posters. They liked it, framed it, and displayed it in their shop. It became a talking point amongst customers who asked if they could buy the poster. The shop began to sell copies (it was no longer copyright) which became extremely popular and spawned an host of imitations. The poster, as you might have guessed, was a striking red and featured a crown below which was a simple five-word message in a large, bold and distinctive white font - 'Keep calm and carry on'.

'Keep calm and carry on' might be the summary of our two readings this morning. In the first, we heard part of Luke's gospel narrative in which Jesus was teaching in the temple precincts and some of his disciples commented on the impressive nature of the building. The response must have taken them by surprise as Jesus predicted the destruction of the building and went on to talk about a number of terrible things that he prophesied would happen. He would have left them and there would be a number of people claiming to be him returning, but the disciples were not to panic. There were going to be wars and rumours of wars, there would be international conflict, insurrection and civil unrest, but the disciples were not to panic. There would be natural disasters - earthquakes, famines, plagues and diseases, but the disciples were not to panic. The early church was going to experience persecution; the disciples would be driven from Synagogues, arrested by the secular authorities, betrayed by their family and friends, but even then the disciples were not to panic. Some of them would be put to death, and yet the disciples were not to panic; in what seems to be a contradictory message not an hair of their heads would be touched, ultimately all would be well for them.

In our first lesson, we heard from Paul, writing to the Thessalonians. We might think that this was less about keeping calm and more about carrying on. It appears that Paul was writing to those who had expected the imminent return of Jesus and that that expectation had created some dissension within the ranks of the young church. It would seem that there were some who had given up working and were simply waiting. Why they behaved like that is not clear. They might have taken the view that if Jesus was soon to return there was no point

earning or saving for the future; it might have been that in the sort of community that the church had created in which possessions were shared they'd simply decided that there was little point contributing whilst others were doing so; it might have been that they thought that the life of the church demanded all their time though Paul is clear that these people were not doing anything constructive but merely being busybodies. Paul was worried by this turn of events; the Christian community should not be seen to encourage idleness; the church should be seen still to be a part of society whose members lived worthwhile lives and not to bring opprobrium on the name of Jesus. He points to himself; he has not depended on the generosity of the Thessalonians or stopped his work as a tent-maker though he might have done. He continued to support himself through his work and called on the Thessalonians to do so; as they waited they were to carry on being exemplary citizens.

The 'Keep Calm and Carry On' poster was printed in large numbers but never issued and it is not clear why. It might be that the message was deemed to be less unambiguous than originally thought; people would not be sure what was saying: what were they supposed to do? And there seems to be a dissonance between the alarming red background and the message conveyed. We might feel the same about today's lections. It is all very well to say keep calm but why should we if there is cause for alarm? And how do we 'carry on'?

On the wall of an orphanage in Kolkata there is a poem which was written by Mother Teresa. It is known as 'Anyway':

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered.  
Forgive them anyway.  
If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.  
Be kind anyway.  
If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.  
If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.  
What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight.  
Create anyway.  
If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.  
The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.  
Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.  
In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

Why should we keep calm when around us is chaos? Because it is about God anyway. Whatever is going on in the world, our allegiance is to Christ. We live for him and we seek to be faithful.

We seek to be faithful as God is faithful. Our calling is to live for Christ as Christ has lived for us. Jesus predicted the things that Jesus prophesied the disciples would experience – the destruction of the temple, being dragged from the Synagogue, betrayal by those close, being tried by the authorities, being put to death – in the days before his own passion – when the temple authorities would abuse their power to plot against him, when his disciples would betray, deny and abandon him, when he would be forced to appear before Pilate, would be nailed to a cross – and this was the route to resurrection. When years later, Jesus' words were recorded in the Gospel, the promised Holy Spirit was with the disciples in their hour of need because Christ had endured all that for us. Whatever else might occur, the disciples were simple to participate in Christ's faithfulness.

There is, you might be aware, a General Election campaign going on. We live in troubled political times and there are reasons to worry; we might fear the economic consequences of the UK leaving the EU and the uncertainty that there is; we seem to be seeing the destruction of open, friendly soc; we are seeing the rise of nationalism here, elsewhere in Europe and across the Atlantic; we are witnessing increasing distrust in the political class; we are subject to the deliberate use of misleading information. Our Joint Public Issues Team has published reflections on our situation which are summarized in three words. Love, pray, vote. That is our Christian duty: to love our neighbour, to pray in confidence, to vote as we are guided by our faith.

We might consider 'Love, pray, vote' a better motto for the Church at this time than 'Keep calm and carry on' but however we express it, the call to us is clear. Whatever happens in the world, the Holy Spirit guides us to live faithfully, as Christ is faithful to us.